

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XVI



By Philip E. Busby

**Question #21** - *“Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people.”*

We ended our last segment by talking mostly about the Septuagint and the why and how it came to exist. However, the main point of that overall discussion was about the fact the Jews had grown to have a better personal knowledge of the Word of God than maybe any time before. This is not just important to the conversation about the Jews living in a time when some were on the land in great numbers while many still were not; it's important to the later times when the Jews would be mostly off the land and hold no governing power over it. The personal knowledge of the Torah and other books of the Hebrew Bible were/are specifically important for the individual Jew, as well as non-Jew, being able to recognize Jesus as The Messiah. This is true no matter how many in the past or present may or may not do just that!

Of more immediate consequence to the time period of the Greek rule, which we are discussing here, are the events that led up to and created the the feast of Hanukkah. Far too many people are not really aware of the real reasons for its observance, and to them Hanukkah seems to be the Jewish version of the many celebrations based on the winter solstice. Of course, the most widely known, and celebrated, of those events is Christmas,

which is the Christian version of such “holidays,” and for Christians it is suppose to be the celebration of the birth of Christ. Now, there is a lot we could talk about when it comes to the good, the bad, and even the ugly in Christmas, as well as many other holidays, but I really only bring the issue up as an example of a holiday coming to be recognized/celebrated at the time of year Christmas is.

While religions the world over commonly celebrate the two solstices and equinoxes, the winter one has always held high meaning for many cultures. This is because people are marking the shortest day of the year (speaking in terms of daylight hours), and there's a feeling that if we've survived to that day there is real hope we will make it through till spring. Statistically, this is a very incorrect thought, but emotionally it has always struck a tone of hope. In any case, this thought is emphasized by the fact that after the winter solstice the days are getting longer and we are headed for warmer times in the year. The problem is that because celebrations of this sort were already so important to so many cultures, which the establishment of the Christian religion wished to assimilate, this time of year was chosen to establish the celebration of Christmas.

One note on this is that the seasons are reversed in the Southern Hemisphere from what they are in the North. However, the Christian religion held its seat of power in the North and the northern winter solstice won out. The other odd fact in man's worship of the creation is that many of these solstice and equinox celebrations got moved due to various factors; and thus, most cultures do not observe their celebrations directly on the astronomical event(s) they were originally meant to celebrate. What this means is that in spite of the Christian religion's success in making Christmas the main event at this time of year, many non-Christian aspects of the older celebrations easily, and some intentionally, got mingled into Christmas in spite of the fact Christmas does not take place directly on the winter solstice. All this has a lot to do with man's rising use of set calendars, but what is more important to our discussion here is the fact some of the non-Christian celebrations of the winter solstice did and have remained completely intact!

This makes it very easy for people to assume Hanukkah is simply the Jewish version of this same category of celebrations. What makes it even easier for people to think this way is that just as with Christmas (which never really was uncorrupted by the non-Christian celebrations), Hanukkah has been affected by some of the other events. Jews have had difficulty keeping the separation and clarity Hanukkah once had. While many holidays

incorporate various traditions that are, in truth, the same things, such as gift giving, etc., there were not nearly as many commonalities to Hanukkah's original observance to something such as Christmas until our more recent times.

Having covered all that, my point is, Hanukkah is not one of the various celebrations and/or observances based on the winter solstice! In truth, it is merely a fact (what some might call a coincidence) that Hanukkah comes around the same time of year, because its reason for existing has absolutely nothing to do with a desire or Biblical commandment to even observe a major, or minor, winter celebration. To be clear on this point, Hanukkah is not one of the feast days laid out by God in the Law, nor was the time of year specifically chosen by religious leaders as was the case with Christmas. Hanukkah is the remembrance of a purely historical event, and it has some major implications to the question this series is attempting to answer. Why? Because to believe the Jews are not the chosen nation God established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is to believe the nation had disappeared by the time of the Greeks. If that is not your assertion, Hanukkah makes for a very difficult argument. If those of the chosen nation were the ones who established Hanukkah, it becomes an observance that a people not truly of the chosen nation picked up and started celebrating just because it was one that belonged to the nation originally!

Stop and think about that for a minute. The Christian religion could not resist picking the winter solstice time of year in which to set one of its most treasured celebrations, no matter how much non-Christian influence had to be fought and/or intermingled in order to do so. This because celebrations of this type and at this time of year are so popular! If you were a people attempting to hijack the identity of being God's chosen nation, you would have been maintaining Hanukkah in the face of there being many other cultures celebrating a major winter holiday in order to take up an observance that traditionally rejected being anything like those. This is why I brought up the fact it has only been in more recent times things such as Christmas have really begun to intermix or be "borrowed" from by those observing Hanukkah. Through the centuries, Jews, and this is a point affecting their children in particular, have not celebrated Christmas or the like. They did not celebrate it in their homes, nor take part in the festivities carried out around them in the cultures they lived among. Unless you've tried to do such a thing, you just can't understand how difficult this is to do, especially if your intent is not just that you don't bother celebrating but you want to avoid it!

Understand that the Jewish religion rejects Jesus as The Messiah, and Christmas is suppose to be the celebration of Jesus' birth and important because He is The Messiah. This fact is why Christianity even exists! On a religious level there can be almost nothing more incorrect than taking part in a celebration so central to the belief which separates you from another religion. Jews also have a deep desire to stay at distance from any of the other winter celebrations in the fear the knowledge of Hanukkah will be lost! This shows a deep passion for preserving and remembering, generation upon generation, an important event that is directly tied to your people's continued existence! If the Jews we know today were not the the chosen nation at the time Hanukkah's events took place, why did it happen? If the Jews we know today are not the chosen nation because they displaced the true nation in some way after these events, especially in light of how few outside those who are Jewish even know what Hanukkah is, why keep such an event on your calendar? What is the point?

With that in mind, let's go into the historical reason Jews have and do celebrate Hanukkah. It's important to remember all the turmoil the nation had been through up to this point. It's important to understand the Scriptures had become more personal than ever to the Jews, and maybe most importantly, the fact the Hellenization of the world was in full swing! It's important to understand the turmoil the nation had been through because these events were a very do or die, as the saying goes, time for the nation. If there was ever a time to give up their identity as the chosen nation, it was at this point. While some could argue the time of Esther fits that better, one needs to remember the edict of death put forth against the Jews was a sudden occurrence in that time, and the Jews had every reason to fight because it was a literal fight for their lives! In contrast, when it comes to the time of Hanukkah, the threat fought against was one that could simply have been gone along with and life might truly have become more prosperous and peaceful for Jews everywhere.

Lest we forget, this was a time when there were even many Jews who viewed letting go of the Biblical ways in favor of the new Greek way, which we call Hellenization, as the thing to do. This means for the events of Hanukkah to take place, there had to be Jews of the mindset that if Jews were going to disappear as a people, it was going to have to be because everyone who cared about being the chosen nation died in the trying to preserve their ways. This is why it's important to understand personal knowledge of God's Word had really risen! The Torah makes it clear that the nation exists for

a purpose, and teaches how God brought it into existence. People don't give their lives for history that is already lost or they feel has no personal meaning to them! With this, one should consider that while the temple is central to the story of Hanukkah, not all Jews cared so much about the temple. I can just hear the collective gasp as some react to that statement, but the reality is twofold.

There were those who simply were satisfied, or became too comfortable with the synagogue system. Christians would understand this best by relating it to a desire to have a church "home." To Jews who had already stopped worrying about stipulations of the Law that required them to go to the temple in Jerusalem, the temple being inaccessible would not have mattered so much. This is not even to mention those who felt they lived too far away to come on a regular basis, or those who had simply become complacent about going, feeling there would always be tomorrow. The second main factor is that there were those who felt the temple had been corrupted to such a degree they saw no reason to go or felt it was wrong. In these types of arguments there are always those who come to these conclusions for both right and wrong reasons. That's why we should all be very thankful God can see each heart, and only He will be our judge in the end!

The point is, if the temple had been all that really mattered to Jews, there may never have been a large scale uprising against what the Greeks did. So what did the Greeks do? The answer to that takes us back to the fact the Greek rulers had begun to see the world's acceptance of the Greek ways as a source and/or opportunity to gain power. There is no simple way to rundown the history from Alexander the Great to the time of the event Hanukkah celebrates without leaving out many elements different people find crucial, but trying to give a thorough history is outside the scope of our study here. Thus, I will attempt to give a shorthand version of what takes us to the important points of our discussion. To start with, I'll be a little more specific about what I've continued to repeat concerning the fact four of Alexander the Great's generals took over after his death. The reality is that this was actually a very messy affair involving many different military leaders and pieces of Alexander's family. However, while the history is not as clear-cut as any shorthand will make it appear, the empire did split into four main sectors with the main generals being: Antipater, who took over Macedon and Greece; Antigonus I Monophthalmus (maybe better known as Cyclops), who took western Asia Minor; Seleucus I Nicator, who took Mesopotamia east and into the top of India; and Ptolemy

I Soter, who took Egypt and land holdings west along the Mediterranean coast.

An important fact is that after Alexander's death there was great disagreement among the generals who met in Babylon to determine how to handle the empire. Much of this was based on the fact that among Alexander's remaining family there was no obvious successor. Thus, Antipater was confirmed as "General of Greece," which in many ways made him the true power. However, a man named Perdiccas was named "Regent of the Empire," and a man named Craterus was given the title "Guardian of the Royal Family." Together these three were the obvious political group to take over the empire, but it would not be that simple. Ptolemy I was given responsibility over Egypt; he established his capital as Alexandria, and began to make trouble with those in Greece. Perdiccas was never popular, and after bloody battles over power and various family issues, he was finally assassinated by the soldiers of his own army while on a campaign against Ptolemy I in Egypt. This resulted in Antipater becoming the "Regent of the Empire" in 320 B.C., but oddly the significance of Greece itself would not be long lasting in the fight over the empire.

Antigonus I being in control of a large amount of territory in Asia Minor had ambitions to rule even more. Ptolemy I had his sights on gaining control of the promised land, even attempting to use the Sabbath as a way to attack while the Jews were observing the day of rest in 320 B.C. His attempt was not successful, and Antigonus I generally ended up holding power over the promised land. In Babylon, Seleucus Nicator was considered a good ruler over his territory, but was not without his own ambitions; and by 312 B.C. he had established what would be known as the Seleucid Dynasty. However, Antigonus I's ambition would come to be the one considered such a threat to the others that they would work together to keep Antigonus I in check. In this conflict, Antigonus I was killed in battle about 301 B.C., and his territory was then divided up between the others. Seleucus Nicator would obtain most of it; he would found the city of Antioch and begin using it as his capital. Antioch being very much at the crossroads of Asia Minor and Greece to the west, Mesopotamia (which Seleucus already held) to the east, and the promised land to the south put him in a powerful position.

On the other hand, Ptolemy I gained the control over the promised land that he had initially desired, and would be the father of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Alexandria Egypt. Unfortunately, none of this would end the fight-

ing among them, specifically back and forth across the promised land. Ptolemy II Philadelphus would eventually take his father's throne in Alexandria, and it would be in his reign the Septuagint was produced. It would be very popular with the Jews, many of whom had fled to Egypt during the turbulent times the promised land was suffering. By about 222 B.C. Antiochus III was the Seleucid king. He would eventually push south in an attempt to overrun the northern territory of the promised land, and to take the promised land as a whole. By this time, Ptolemy IV Philopator was on the throne in Alexandria. Philopator drove Antiochus III back to the north and defeated him in 217 B.C. Fresh off his victory, Philopator returned to Egypt and stopped in Jerusalem on his way. There he wished to celebrate his victory by sacrificing on the altar at the temple, but the Jews rightfully kept him from doing so. Angered by what he saw as a great insult, Philopator began a program aimed at killing every Jew in Alexandria.

Philopator would die about thirteen years later, and about six years after that, Antiochus III, in another southern push, would add the entire promised land to his territory. Antiochus III was greatly encouraged by his success at bringing the empire back together and wanted to solidify Asia Minor and Greece, which, in many ways, had become disconnected from the rest of the pieces of Alexander's original territory. This was a critical mistake because it brought the king face to face with the rising power of Rome. After bloody conflict with the Romans, Antiochus III turned back to Asia Minor; but in the area of Ephesus he was met by a Roman army under the command of a general named Scipio. This would be in the year 190 B.C. and mark the true beginning of Rome's involvement in the affairs of what we call the Middle East.

After these defeats, Rome would dictate a devastating peace agreement to Antiochus III. It would include loss of territory, restrictions on military power, and Rome would demand twenty hostages be sent to Rome in order to ensure his loyalty. One of the hostages would be Antiochus' own son named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Epiphanes' brother would inherit their father's throne; and Epiphanes, after spending many years in Rome, would be allowed to return from Rome in exchange for his brother's heir. In 175 B.C. Epiphanes' brother was assassinated, but Epiphanes overcame the assassin and took the throne. Epiphanes saw the best way to exert his own power, and shape the world into his view of what it should be, as a push to completely Hellenize the territory under his rule, which included the promised land. This is where the story of what led to Hanukkah really begins,

because of all the people who had or had not already tossed aside their culture for the Greek ways, there would be none so unyielding as that of the Jews!

With relationship to where we started this segment, it's very easy for different cultures of the world to find themselves on the same side of things no matter how different they may seem to be one from another, and this is for very simple reasons, which James defines for us in the New Testament. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4 Those cultures who had not for the most part already converted to the Greek ways were not considered a threat to this Hellenization attempt. The only way any of them would become a threat is if they decided to become disruptive in defense of their own culture. However, as we have covered, the people at large were very impressed with the Greek ways, and there is no evidence this was going to be a problem for most all the cultures under Epiphanes' control. Epiphanes likely even hoped to impress the Romans themselves by doing this. However, the devil, and thus, men who seek power in this world, know the Jewish culture is a direct threat to globalization just by its very existence!

This fact is why we see the Jews being considered a threat even when they have done nothing in particular to be noticed, and/or in many times and ways when they have caused no disruption remotely comparable to what others have and/or are doing! The two great historical examples again are the story of Esther, where a man close to the king singled out the Jews as being a people with strange laws and not worth the risk of allowing them to live. This came in spite of the fact the Jews had done nothing to bring themselves to the king's notice before that. The other is the modern event of the Holocaust, where a man in Germany leading a political group which was determined to take over Germany, along with other countries, and, at the very least, eventually transform the world, also took note of the Jews. Thus, the Nazis saw the extermination of the Jews as a top priority in spite of the cost and resources it would take from their efforts to conquer the world, not to mention the fact Jews were some of the most productive members of German society as well as in those countries they began to conquer.

Many other examples both great and small exist that show the world's resistance to the Jews along with an insistence of minimizing, if not annihilating, Jews from particular areas and/or in particular ways. Jews are tradi-

tionally seen as a threat, and the Greeks felt this too. While some would argue the same things were true at the time of the Greeks that were pointed out to the Medes and Persian rulers (as the Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem upon their return from the Babylonian captivity), it makes no difference if Jews are pushing back or simply trying to live their lives in peace, they are almost always seen as a rebellious people the world would be better off without. What is interesting at the time of the Greeks is that, while Epiphanes killed many Jews, he did not go after the Jews as a people as much as he went after the real reason they are seen as a threat, and that was/is the Laws God gave them to live by.

At the time of Esther the Laws the Jews followed were pointed to as the problem, but extinguishing the Jewish people was seen as the answer. Hitler had - for lack of a better way of saying it - the "advantage" of hindsight. Hitler had the opportunity to study what the Greeks had attempted. However, by his time the temple was gone and the Jews still remained. That being true, he also saw this other religion called Christianity, which claimed to hold much of the same basic writings the Jews held as core to its beliefs, yet the establishment of the Christian religion did not seem a threat and the Jews still did. Why? Because the Christian religious establishment was/is not truly Biblical and also has seen the Jews as a threat to their power. This should cause all true believers to live with the realization, and never forget, that attempting to live by the Laws of God will make you an enemy of the world. This is not untrue for non-Jews just because the Jews are the world's lightning rod on the issue! The Jews being the lightning rod is simply the reason that in man's attempt at globalization, men such as Hitler tend to go more directly after the physical existence of the Jews as a people!

It's hard to know if Epiphanes had any grasp on the fact destroying the individual's ability to find and obtain the true Word of God, which is the disruptive force in man's attempt at making the world one, was what he needed to do or not. However, one way or another, it seemed logical to him to go after God's Law directly, and the story shows us there is simply nothing in our time that true believers will face that the Jewish people have not already faced. Long before Hitler found allies among the Christian religion, Epiphanes found, with so many Jews turning to the Greek's way of thinking, there were Jewish allies in his attempt to snuff out God's Law. They had served as "the voices of reason" to other Jews about why it was not necessary to care and even archaic to hold on to God's ways. While there was some success in this, this is why I point out over and over that Jews had an

internal struggle. For as much as those, such as the Sadducees, may have desired to turn to the Greek way of thinking, the roots of this had more to do with a way to interpret the Laws of God than it did about abandoning their Jewish identity. Epiphanes doing what he did solidified in the minds of many Jews, consisting of both the common man as well as the religious leadership, how unprepared they were to completely give up being Jewish!

Now, just how much effort Epiphanes may have put into any attempt to initially convince all the Jews to give up the Laws of God voluntarily before he went headlong into an aggressive policy of attempting to make God's Law totally illegal is unclear. However, what we know it came to was an edict that outlawed the Torah in its entirety! When the Jews refused to simply obey, emissaries and soldiers were sent to the Jews and specifically Jerusalem. Copies of the Torah were burned, circumcision was banned, and heavy taxes were imposed on the Jews with the intent of destroying the land. Further, the temple itself would be desecrated. A statue of the Greeks most revered god Zeus was set up in the temple. Swine, which was and still is a very popular sacrifice for pagans but totally forbidden for the Jews, were sacrificed on the temple's altar in order to make it unusable for the offerings commanded in the Law. This was the desecration that made the temple desolate which Daniel was told about! (Dan. 11:29-31)

However, God also told Daniel that these things, and more, would be allowed to happen in order to purge the nation and show that with all those who could simply claim to be the chosen nation by right of birth, the true chosen people are those to whom God's ways are not just another religion. (Dan. 12:9-13) Many Jews would not simply give up God's ways, but struggle to maintain them under the most difficult of circumstances. How did they know what to do? Many of them had hid the Word of God in their hearts, not just as a matter of practice, but for the very reason all true believers should desire to be Biblical instead of religious, and that is so that no matter in what circumstances we might find ourselves, we might not sin against God! (Ps. 119:9-16)

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

